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INFO RUEHRL/AMEMBASSY BERLIN PRIORITY 0285  
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RUEHLO/AMEMBASSY LONDON PRIORITY 3611  
RUEHNE/AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI PRIORITY 0767  
RUEHNY/AMEMBASSY OSLO PRIORITY 3698  
RUEHOT/AMEMBASSY OTTAWA PRIORITY 1018  
RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO PRIORITY 2778  
RUEHCG/AMCONSUL CHENNAI PRIORITY 7521  
RUEHBI/AMCONSUL MUMBAI PRIORITY 5224  
RUEHON/AMCONSUL TORONTO PRIORITY 0143  
RHEFDIA/DIA WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY  
RUEHGV/USMISSION GENEVA PRIORITY 1906  
RHEHAAA/NATIONAL SECURITY COUNCIL WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY  
RHHMUNA/HQ USPACOM HONOLULU HI PRIORITY  
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 COLOMBO 000451

SIPDIS

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DEPARTMENT FOR SCA/INS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 03/19/2017

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PTER](#) [MOPS](#) [CE](#)

SUBJECT: SRI LANKA: OUTSPOKEN FORMER MINISTER, NOW A  
GOVERNMENT CRITIC, ARRESTED

REF: A) COLOMBO 170 B) COLOMBO 230 C) COLOMBO 292 D)  
COLOMBO 446

Classified By: Ambassador Robert O. Blake, Jr., for reasons 1.4(b,d).

11. (SBU) SUMMARY. Former Minister of Port Development, Sripathi Sooriyarachchi, was arrested Saturday by the Criminal Investigation Department (CID) on charges of corruption for failing to return his government assigned vehicle after his dismissal as a minister. Sripathi alleges that he returned the car on March 3, two weeks before the arrest, and that the charges are actually the government's retaliation for his outspoken criticism. Sripathi's mentor and former Foreign Minister, Mangala Samaraweena, added fuel to the fire by calling on "democratic forces" to combat the "emerging tyranny" of the current administration. End Summary.

ZERO TOLERANCE FOR LATE RETURN OF VEHICLE  
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12. (SBU) Sripathi Sooriyarachchi was one of President Mahinda Rajapaksa's principal campaign advisors during the 2005 presidential election. After Rajapaksa's victory in November 2005, Sripathi was appointed Minister of Port Development. On February 9, 2007, Sripathi was fired along with former Ministers Mangala Samaraweera and Anura Bandaranaike, brother of former President Chandrika Bandaranaike Kumaratunga (ref A). While Anura quickly made peace with Rajapaksa and rejoined the ruling coalition, Sripathi and Mangala have become perhaps the most outspoken critics of Rajapaksa and his brothers, Gothabaya and Basil (ref C).

13. (U) On March 16, a Colombo magistrate granted permission to the CID to investigate Sripathi's alleged failure to return his government-owned Land Rover after his dismissal as minister. The report was produced the same day and noted that the car was returned to the government on March 3, less than one month after Sripathi was dismissed from his post.

On March 17, Sripathi was summoned to CID headquarters. Prior to leaving his house, he contacted The Sunday Times to tell them that the allegations against him were not true, citing the fact that the car had already been returned to the government. After approximately five hours of interrogation, Sripathi was placed under arrest. CID Chief D.W. Prathapasinge did not comment on the report stating that the car had already been returned to the government, but instead maintained that Sripathi was also being investigated for potentially criminal links to the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE). He was only charged, however, with the offense related to his failure to return the Land Rover on a timely basis.

#### CRUSADING EX-MINISTER CHARGES MASSIVE CORRUPTION

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14. (SBU) Sripathi claimed that his arrest is a result of his criticism of the Rajapaksa administration and not of any real wrong-doing. Sripathi has repeatedly alleged that during the presidential election campaign of 2005 Rajapaksa representatives cut a secret deal with the LTTE to suppress Tamil votes (which likely would have gone to Rajapaksa's opponent) in exchange for large sums of cash (ref D). Government critics believe that Sripathi's arrest represents a government effort to prevent a parliamentary inquiry into the "secret deal" allegation.

15. (U) Previously, on March 14, Sripathi and Mangala leveled fresh charges of corruption against the administration, claiming that the President's brother, Defense Secretary Gothabaya Rajapaksa, received kickbacks of

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about 600 million Rupees (approximately 6 million U.S. dollars) on a recent purchase of MiG 27 fighter jets from Ukraine. The government denied the allegations and accused Sripathi and Mangala of harboring terrorist sympathies and attempting to embolden the LTTE with their muckraking.

16. (U) In a particularly pointed interview, Mangala told the Daily Mirror that all forces for democracy must rise up to challenge the "emerging tyranny" of the Rajapaksa administration. He called on political parties as well as civil society to fight "against this dictatorship," stating that "a small clique of persons cannot be allowed to destroy democracy." Mangala spent the last half of the interview defending his own political record and claiming that he had not done anything "wrong" to cause Rajapaksa to fire him from his position as Foreign Minister.

DO NOT PASS GO

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17. (U) Sripathi was arraigned on Saturday before a Colombo magistrate and remanded to the prison hospital, ostensibly for Sripathi's protection. In a typically flamboyant move, Sripathi stated in court that he preferred confinement with the general prison population; the magistrate accommodated his request. His next hearing was set for March 20. In the two days since, pictures of Sripathi behind bars have graced the front pages of almost every Sri Lankan newspaper.

18. (C) COMMENT: The sparring between the Rajapaksas on the one hand, and Mangala and Sripathi on the other, is developing into a high-stakes game of political "chicken," with neither side willing to disclose all of the evidence they allege is in their possession. If Sripathi and Mangala have physical evidence of the "secret deal" with the LTTE, they are clearly holding it in reserve to release at a time of maximum effect. The government's attempts to keep them boxed in appear heavy-handed by comparison; the pictures of Sripathi incarcerated are more likely to help his cause than to hurt it. However, Mangala's recent unsolicited defense of his actions while serving as Foreign Minister underline the fact that he is also likely to be hit by any bombshell that

explodes too close to the administration.  
BLAKE